

Promising Practices: Continuous Improvement Program Model

Pensacola State College

Health Profession Opportunity Grant

As the Health Profession Opportunity Grants (HPOG) program, funded by the Administration for Children and Families' Office of Family Assistance, progresses through its third year, grantees are applying the lessons learned from their first years of implementation to increase the effectiveness of their programs. At Pensacola State College (PSC), HPOG project director Inger Barnes and her team have implemented a continuous improvement model designed to systematize this process.

During the early years of the grant, PSC's HPOG team worked with community partners, college personnel, and others to develop operational protocols and guidelines. The continuous improvement model provides the HPOG team and its partners an opportunity to review and update these resources through perception surveys, focus groups, structured reviews of procedures and forms, and reviews of MOUs (memorandums of understanding). The annual cycle for this process runs from the middle of one year to the middle of the next, allowing the results of the review to be used for evaluation and reporting in the fourth quarter of the grant year. By the end of this year, Ms. Barnes expects a complete set of guidelines, protocols, and forms to be finished.

Once these tools have been reviewed and updated, they are shared with the project's stakeholders. At PSC, these stakeholders are organized into four committees: the Community Coordinating Council, the Family Services Committee, the Training and Employment Committee, and the Grant Management Committee.

The Community Coordinating Council includes decision makers from each participating organization and meets quarterly to review the operations of the project and oversee the coordination of services across the community. Council members assist the project staff in monitoring the project's continuous improvement plan, and at least one member of the council serves on each of the two committees that report to the council: the Family Services Committee and the Training and Employment Committee.

The Family Services Committee meets quarterly to review the delivery of services to project participants and recommend procedural changes, as well as changes to the project's services, to the project director. The committee evaluates the family services component of the project annually. Also meeting quarterly is the Training and Employment Committee, which reviews the delivery of educational and educational support services. Like the Family Services Committee, the Training and Employment Committee annually reviews and recommends procedural changes to the project director.

Lastly, the Grant Management Committee is made up of membership from within the college. This committee meets monthly to ensure that the grant is operating smoothly and resolve internal problems related to it. The HPOG project director may bring recommendations from other committees to this body for feedback. The Grant Management Committee also assists in the annual grant evaluation.

Grouping the project's stakeholders in this way facilitates communication and collaborative decision making and crystallizes the roles and responsibilities of each partner. It also establishes the actors who will carry out the changes recommended by PSC's continuous improvement process, specifically the Community Coordinating Council and Grant Management Committee. This structure, combined with the program's review mechanisms, helps PSC's HPOG program evolve and adapt to the changing demands of students, partners, and employers.

HPOG Promising Practices: “Early Warning” Case Management Pensacola State College

When asked what the strongest element of their program is, Pensacola State College’s HPOG staff agreed that it was the intensive case management provided to all students. According to the staff, this case management is the reason many of the program’s participants have successfully completed their trainings.

Pensacola’s case management services are provided by program partner Catholic Charities of Northwest Florida. Catholic Charities is a nonprofit, 501(c)(3), charitable organization that aims to effect social change by helping individuals and families remove barriers to self-sufficiency, unlock potential, and build up personal dignity. The Northwest Florida branch is one of hundreds across the county and serves residents of Florida’s 18 most northwest counties.

Catholic Charities’ case managers initially meet with every HPOG participant to complete an assessment, identify barriers, and review the HPOG success plan. Following this initial meeting, students meet with case managers at least twice a month to identify barriers, identify emergent needs, monitor academic progress, and promote job readiness skills. For students who need support services, case managers provide quick and easy referrals which are recorded in the student’s file. In addition, case managers refer students to other community service providers to assist with additional resources.

Project director Inger Barnes attributes the success of Pensacola’s case management to the program’s “early warning” strategy. With this approach, case managers take note of any potential barriers a student might face—through discussions during their twice monthly meetings, through tracking of academic performance, or through conversations with other program staff—and attempt to preemptively eliminate them. This task is made easier by weekly meetings where Catholic’s case managers and Pensacola’s HPOG staff share information on a student’s progress and challenges. This ongoing communication keeps both parties aware of students’ needs and ways they can be addressed, and it helps students receive truly “wraparound” support.

Ms. Barnes also credits the dedication of the case managers, as well as their willingness to be flexible and available to students. Furthermore, the case managers’ passion and ability to establish rapport with the students leads the latter to feel a sense of accountability to their case managers, which helps them accomplish the goals set by both parties. By partnership with an organization that is well versed in case management, the Pensacola HPOG program can focus on other program elements, all while students receive high quality services.